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**NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH WILL HONOR CLINTON'S COMMITMENT TO  
INCREASE SPINAL CORD INJURY RESEARCH**

President Clinton's personal commitment to film star Christopher Reeve last May to direct \$10 million more into spinal cord injury research will be honored during the calendar year May 1996 to May 1997, assures Harold Varmus, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Varmus said yesterday he expects an NIH-sponsored workshop planned for September 30 and October 1 to create a certain excitement and attract new researchers to the field of spinal cord injury who are currently working in areas that are ancillary to spinal cord research. He also believes that the participants of the workshop will be stimulated to identify new areas for research in spinal cord injury.

Varmus told Washington Fax that part of the funds to be used in completing the \$10 million commitment will come from his Director's Discretionary Fund. He said he has no problem using the fund for this purpose because the science in the area is "extremely good and deserving of support."

In FY 95, NIH spent approximately \$47 million for research on spinal cord injury and regeneration. This includes more than \$39 million through the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). Asked whether that \$47 million would increase to \$57 million during the May to May calendar year, Varmus responded that that would be the case.

His response agrees with the statement in a recent NIH backgrounder, "Curing Paralysis: A Total NIH Research Effort," that NIH is developing a plan to increase research in that area through new initiatives.

Varmus is quoted in the backgrounder as saying, "Research on spinal cord injury is contributing to ways to treat other disorders, such as Parkinson's disease...and research on other disorders, such as stroke, is contributing to our understanding of spinal cord injury. Our ability to design new approaches to many diseases depends on basic research that illuminates the fundamental properties of molecules, cells and tissues, such as the brain and spinal cord. Progress against challenging disorders is the result of the U.S. Government's policy to support research based on scientific excellence rather than on presumed relevance to certain disorders."

The \$10 million presidential commitment to Reeve created unrest among special interest groups and, to some extent, among Hill staff, because there is no new money involved.

"NIH is always unhappy with us about earmarking funds for specific disorders and particularly unhappy when we don't provide additional funding," said a Hill staffer. "What's the difference if the president does it? It still means NIH has to take funds intended for one use and redirect it to the unfunded mandate."

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Reeve (Cont'd)

Congressional earmarking of funds for research into specific diseases has continually been resisted by NIH, and for the last several years it has been opposed by the chairs of the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies subcommittee--first by the late Rep. William Natcher, D-KY, and now by Rep. John Porter, R-IL.

The president of a disease-specific interest group says he is "confused."

"When we have met with NIH officials and even hinted that we were going to ask for money for our disease, NIH officials got upset and talked about how basic research on broad areas, not specific diseases, results in cures. Now, I am not so sure that I won't ask for specific money in the future for our disease. I am a great admirer of Christopher Reeve, he truly is an awesome human being, but folks who have the disease I fight for have every right to expect money to be earmarked to help fight it, because they are going to die," he lamented.

A former NIH institute fiscal officer says of the president's commitment that it is "unfair since it was made nearly halfway into the fiscal year. The FY 96 fiscal year ends September 30. With the tight fiscal constraints, at this late date it is almost impossible to find that kind of money uncommitted. So it really means you have to take funds from one high priority research area and apply it to another, pitting one high priority area against the other."

The flip side of this discussion comes from those who represent special interest associations that believe Christopher Reeve has done more to bring the need to fund biomedical research to the center of the nation's focus than has been done at any time in the past. They refer to the very dramatic speech delivered by Reeve at the Democratic National Convention. Reeve's speech prompted President Clinton in his own speech to call for more biomedical research.

"I want to balance the budget with real cuts in government and waste. I want a plan that invests in education, as mine does, in technology, and, yes, in research, as Christopher Reeve so powerfully reminded us we must do," said Clinton.

Among other reasons for supporting biomedical research Reeve pointed out that the nation spends nearly \$8 billion annually for the cost of care and services for the estimated 200,000 severely disabled survivors of spinal cord trauma, while the nation spend about \$47 billion on biomedical research.

The NIH workshop, to be held at the Pooks Hill Marriott Hotel in Bethesda, Maryland, is being sponsored by NINDS, the National Institute of Child health and Human Development, the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Eye Institute.

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Publisher & Editor: Bradie Metheny Managing Editor: Shirley Haley

Marketing/Sales: R. Henry Norweb III

Phone: 508-999-6097 Fax: 508-994-9366